

**UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Glacier National Park
West Glacier, Montana 59936**

Management Directive 8.9

SOCIAL MEDIA

Context

Historically, National Park Service (NPS) communications with visitors have taken place entirely within the boundaries of the parks. Traditional hikes, talks, demonstrations, and visitor center contacts were used to convey NPS messages. Outreach programs reached a limited number of local interested parties (Chambers of Commerce, school groups, and special events...etc.). Little has changed in NPS interpretation and communications for decades. In most parks, our communication efforts look comfortable and familiar because they are the same ones people saw and used as kids. Traditional interpretive programs are a part of the NPS experience and remain a unique part of the NPS identity. However, there are now other options to explore.

With the advent of the Internet, the NPS (in 1995) decided to use this new form of communication and outreach to connect with a broader audience. Potential visitors and other interested parties could then access information about the parks from any computer with internet access. For the last 14 years the NPS has continued to refine the NPS web presence in an effort to maximize its market share of the online audience. At the same time, that audience has grown exponentially and has evolved beyond traditional static web pages. New and interesting multi-media projects have been developed, however the entire NPS effort online remains passive and waits for visitors to find us.

The current trend in web technology is to “push” information to online users and not rely on users finding a site through search engines, links, and viral word of mouth. Glacier’s use of social media tools over the last two years has demonstrated the power of the web as a major component of our communications arsenal. Just as the web itself continues to evolve, so will the way NPS units use these new tools. We need to continue to be proactive and actively seek out and find our new audiences and bring the NPS to them.

What Can Social Media Do For Us?

Increase and expand Glacier’s web presence.

Glacier National Park’s website records over 15 million individual page hits per year. While that is a significant number, there is a potential audience of hundreds of millions of web users using social media tools. We need to use evolving web technologies to seek them out.

Facebook has over 800 million individual registered users. Twitter, YouTube, and Vimeo also reach an audience of hundreds of millions of users. Users of social networking sites visit them repeatedly throughout the day, discovering what is new with their friends and with the subjects and groups they follow. In essence, it is the “hangout joint” on the Web. Users routinely suggest, recommend, share, and pass on information to friends and can easily discover new subjects and topics, based on what their friends have on their pages.

The National Park Service needs to actively use these sites to drive traffic to our website. Since the vast majority of Web users are not “hanging out” on NPS sites, we need to hang out with them to communicate. Meeting the public “where they are”, and “where they expect us to be” on social networking sites, will allow the park to “push” information to users and not rely on waiting for them to come to us. The park needs to place itself in the part of the web that people are actively using.

Increase access to accurate information about Glacier National Park.

Social networking sites allow users to interact directly with each other in a multitude of ways. In addition to individual user pages, Facebook allows for the creation of group and fan pages. Anyone can set up a page on any subject and post whatever information they want. There is nothing to stop users from posting incomplete and inaccurate information about the park. People may search for Glacier National Park information and unknowingly find one of these fake sites. In fact, that is currently happening. There are several Glacier “groups.” In 2009 someone founded a Glacier National Park page that was mistaken by almost 10,000 people as the official NPS site. That page consistently posted inaccurate information and copyrighted images. It is just one example of allowing others to speak for you unless you actively engage in social media and ensure an accurate information presence.

Glacier National Park’s Facebook Page combats those kinds of pages by providing accurate, interesting information and links to our existing site. Users from the other sites quickly discovered which page is the “real deal.” Our users will be our advocates and encourage traffic to come to our site and not one of the imposters

Create a Community

Social Media sites will create a community of users that create content through ongoing dialogs between themselves and by sharing photos and videos with each other.

Puts a Human Face to a Big Agency

Our experience, over the last several years, has been that users are surprised and quite pleased that we post in a way that is conversational, friendly, and treats them like friends. They tell us they feel like they are hearing from a friend in the park, rather than hearing from some anonymous government voice. They feel more connected to this place.

The following visitor testimonies speak to the power of social media to connect visitors to the park; as well as requests for additional information.

"My first impression of Glacier started with Facebook. I discovered you on Facebook right after we booked our trip to Glacier, and through your posts and photos I formed a picture in my mind of this place we would visit. Then we got there and stepped out of the shuttle van at Lake McDonald Lodge and I was filled with awe...we don't have mountains like that in NC! The peace of the lake, the towering mountains all around...Facebook did a good job of preparing me, but nothing compares to being surrounded for 360 degrees by all that beauty."

"The first time I came here I cried and really didn't want to go home. My husband said don't worry we will be here in 10 years. I thought yeah right. That was on our 25th anniversary. On our 35th we moved in to a new house we built in Kalispell. So glad we made the move from Georgia and can enjoy the park at all times."

"Lake McDonald was my home during the summers of '04 and '06-and it still feels like home to me! I met my future husband there, in '08 we were married on it's shore, and we now have a two month old son named Jackson after one of our favorite mtns. in the park. So yeah, it's a pretty meaningful place in our lives! Can't wait to share it with our son!"

"I would like to know more about this man, can anyone direct me to his history."

Park staff will encourage participation among users by posting the following types of information:

- "What is happening now" in the park – i.e. *Beargrass is in full bloom at Logan Pass, consider visiting soon*
(brief bullets of information to keep the community connected to the park)
- Interpretive questions – i.e. *"What does Glacier mean to you?", "How has climate change impacted your visit to Glacier?"*
(creates opportunities for emotional and intellectual connections to resources)
- Rumor control – i.e. *The park is not closed*
(Point users to NPS website to obtain the most updated and correct information)
- Event updates – i.e. *Centennial events, Science and History Day, Spring for Glacier, etc.*
- Breaking news and immediacy of it – i.e. *Stage 2 fire restrictions are now in effect, Rock slide at Big Bend and GTSR is partially closed – see <http://nps.gov/glac>*
- Emergency management – i.e. *Robert Fire is completely out*
- Safety messages – i.e. *be careful around fast moving water and slippery rocks, remember to carry water on hikes*

- Drive traffic to nps.gov/glac for additional info – *i.e. See official news release at <http://nps.gov/glac/parknews/index.htm>*
- Posting videos of interpretive programs, social events, science research, and podcasts.
- Flickr can host high resolution images and reduce the need for staff to fill news and print media requests for royalty free images of the park

Evaluation

The current crop of social media sites has built in evaluation tools that allow us to see who our audience is, how old they are, their gender, what they react to, what they are interested in, what type of content causes a reaction, and what they most want to hear about. These tools can be used to refine our messages and make these sites more powerful communication outlets.

Who posts?

Glacier's inter-divisional social media team will be responsible for posting pertinent information. Division Chiefs will authorize staff from within their divisions to participate. Participation should be voluntary. Only staff authorized by their Division Chief will be allowed access. Currently the Social Media Team consists of the park's Interpretive Specialist, Visual Information Specialist, Librarian, Public Affairs Officer, Hudson Bay District Naturalist, Crown of the Continent Research Learning Center's Director and Science Communication Specialist, and the IT Technician. Ideally the team will consist of a small manageable number of members (7-12) representing a cross section of divisions and job responsibilities. By providing a number of posters the workload will be spread throughout the park and no one person will be unduly burdened with an extra workload. Glacier's internal social networking working group has developed a strategy and process for posting and responding to information on social networking sites, including code of conduct, rules of engagement, and decision tree flow-charts.

Rules of Engagement

These are the official guidelines for social media at Glacier National Park (GLAC). If you are a Glacier Social Networking Administrator, these guidelines are for you. It is expected that all who participate in social media on behalf of Glacier National Park be trained to understand and follow these guidelines. Failure to do so could put both yours and other's future participation at risk. These guidelines will continually evolve as new technologies and social networking tools emerge.

- **Participation.** Administrators of GLAC's Social Networking Committee will meet regularly to discuss any issues and solutions.
- **Hours of engagement.** Administrators will be engaged only during work hours unless approved by their division chief.

- **Frequency.** Frequency of engagement should be frequent enough to keep fans/visitors/audience engaged. You do not like getting spam email, right? Avoid going overboard with sharing to the point that we “turn off” and lose our followers. As these sites evolve and change the frequency of posts will be evaluated to ensure that we are using them to our best advantage.
- **Decision trees.** Administrators will use the “Initiation” and “Response” decision tree flowcharts to assess appropriate submissions and actions.
- **Ask.** When in doubt about anything, administrators will consult their supervisor, other administrators, division chiefs and/or the Public Affairs Office (PAO) before proceeding. If you are about to publish something that makes you even the slightest bit uncomfortable, do not shrug it off and hit 'send.' Take the time to review the decision tree flowcharts and try to figure out what is bothering you, then fix it. Ultimately, the decision about what you publish is yours—as is the responsibility. Ask when in doubt.
- **Accountability.** For accountability, administrators will initial every post on every site we use. i.e. “Beargrass is in full bloom at Logan Pass.” (dr)
- **Did you mess up?** If you make a mistake, admit it right away. Notify your supervisor and other administrators. Be upfront and be quick with the decided correction. Notify other program offices as soon as possible that may be affected. If there will potentially be news media interest from your posting, notify the PAO right away.
- **What would you want to know?** Think of yourself away from Glacier for an extended period of time. Post information that keeps the visitor engaged in the happenings of Glacier National Park. Write stuff people will value. Social communication should help our customers, partners, and co-workers. It should be thought-provoking and build a sense of community with information without creating controversy or an otherwise unintended consequence.
- **Write what you know.** Ensure you write and post about what you know, not just a tip and definitely NOT something that could be a rumor or start a rumor. Seek confirmation from the appropriate person(s) before proceeding. Do not post anything that would otherwise be announced by the Public Affairs Office, a park partner or elsewhere within the park or NPS organization. Check with the PAO first on any potential media topics as well as any information that might be exempt from public disclosure under the Privacy Act and the Freedom of Information Act.
- **It is a conversation.** Talk to readers like you would talk to visitors in the field. Be professional and helpful – customer service matters! Don't be afraid to bring in your own personality. On two-way social networking sites, consider content that is open-ended and invites response. Encourage comments. Also, try to avoid jargon and acronyms too specific to Glacier or the NPS that the public will not understand. Again, consult the decision trees for guidance.

- **Add value through connections and education.** Social communication should add value to Glacier and the NPS. If it helps you, coworkers, our partners, and the public to connect and reconnect with Glacier or another NPS site; if it helps to educate; or if it contributes directly or indirectly to the mission of the NPS, it adds value.
- **Adhere to the principles of the Ethics Guide for Department of the Interior Employees.** Administrators need to be particularly careful of inadvertently making endorsements or political statements. The purpose of Glacier National Park's social media posts do not allow either endorsements or political commentary and should, therefore, be avoided. The complete ethics guide is available at: <http://www.doi.gov/ethics/docs/eg02unbooked.pdf>. Questions should be discussed with the park's ethics counselor (Human Resource Officer).
- **Perception is reality.** In online social networks, the lines between public and private, personal and professional are blurred. By posting information as the official voice of Glacier National Park, you are creating perceptions about the park, its partners and the NPS by our shareholders, stakeholders, neighbors, customers, elected officials, the news media and the general public—and perceptions about you by your colleagues and managers. Do everyone proud.
- **Create some excitement.** Share with the world the exciting things at Glacier National Park and in the NPS. Encourage visitation, encourage new discoveries, encourage people to become involved, and encourage stewardship and engagement. You get the idea.
- **Avoid criticizing policies and administrations.** Our job is to educate and facilitate a connection between the resource and the public, not to publically criticize the NPS, DOI, Glacier, or other parks, entities, and personnel on issues we personally do not agree with.
- **Colorful language.** As Government employees, we sign an appointment affidavit that governs our official conduct and we are in the spotlight more than other organizations. Please do not post any material that is questionable in any manner (i.e. obscene, defamatory, profane, libelous, threatening, harassing, abusive, hateful or embarrassing to another person or entity, etc.). The NPS prides itself in customer service and professionalism by all employees; we must set the proper example.
- **Keep your supervisor and division chief in the loop.** Let him/her know how things are going and respect their input and feedback. It is a privilege to do this, keep it that way.
- **Pictures and videos.** Successful social media makes use of pictures and videos. Apply the same standards you use with text, to any photo or video. Respect copyright and fair-use laws, and credit the appropriate photographer and/or videographer. Always gain permission first.
- **Protect yourself and others.** Be mindful that what you write will be available for a long time. Protect your privacy and other's too. Do not cite visitors, employees, or partners without approval. Never refer to a specific visitor in any identifiable way. Respect copyright

and fair-use laws. Under age children may not be displayed in photos or video footage.

- **Length.** Short and sweet works.

Sites We Will Use

Social Media development is a rapidly moving and developing phenomenon. Glacier's Social Media Team will continue to explore new and developing technologies for possible future use. For the present, Glacier will primarily use Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Flickr.

Facebook is a free-access social networking website where users can join networks organized by city, workplace, school, and region to connect and interact with other people. A February 2009 Compete.com study ranked Facebook as the most used social network. It has 800 million registered users, with over 100 million users accessing the site each day.

Glacier will use Facebook to create a community of users that create content through ongoing dialogs between themselves and by sharing photos and videos with each other.

Twitter is a free social networking and micro-blogging service that enables its users to send and read each other's updates, known as *tweets*. Tweets are text-based posts of up to 140 characters. Twitter is the third most used social network site. It currently records 55 million monthly visits. Twitter is the fastest-growing social networking site. In February 2009, it had a monthly growth rate of 1,382%.

Glacier will use Twitter to "push" messages to followers.

YouTube, Vimeo, and Flickr are video and photo sharing websites. 275 million unique users are sharing videos and Flickr currently has over 3.6 billion images online that users have posted. These sites rank videos based on the number of views they receive and suggest related videos to users. Someone searching for videos on National Parks, glaciers, or hiking, will have suggestions for related content show up. Glacier National Park content will be offered up to users even if they have searched on a different (but related topic). These sites provide built in evaluation tools that record time spent viewing videos, where videos are being viewed (states and countries), demographics based on age and sex, and interest level and duration of time spent viewing.

Glacier will use these sites to engage visitors with high quality video and digital photos. These sites will also become a repository of copyright-free imagery for public use.

Glacier National Park Social Media

Glacier National Park's interdivisional social media team has operated under the guidance of a proposal approved by the Glacier National Park Management Team in 2009. Since then, Glacier has become an NPS leader in the development and use of social media platforms for the National Park Service. Based on experience gained using these new communication tools, that original proposal has been modified and will now serve as Glacier National Park's official Management Directive on Social Media.

APPROVED: _____ DATE: _____
Chas Cartwright, Superintendent